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# SOVIET AFFAIRS ANALYSIS SERVICE

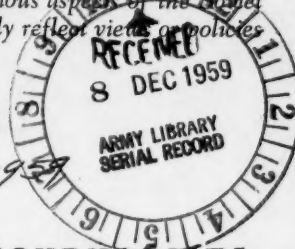
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## CREATION OF AN ASSOCIATION OF SOVIET JOURNALISTS

by

Arkady Gaev

The author of this analysis, Arkady Gaev, is a former Soviet citizen with more than twenty years' experience on various Soviet local and metropolitan newspapers, including Pravda and Izvestia. He now lives in Munich, Germany, where he is a staff-member of the Institute for the Study of the USSR. His many articles on Soviet literature and journalism include "Boris Pasternak and Dr. Zhivago", published in March, 1959 as a special study by the Soviet Affairs Analysis Service.

The month of November, 1959, witnessed an important turning-point in the evolution of Soviet journalism. Meeting at an All-Union Congress of Soviet journalists, the first of its kind ever to be held, delegates from all over the USSR heard top Party leaders, including Khrushchev and Suslov, extol their profession and call for still better performance in the future. An Association of Soviet journalists was also created during the Congress.

All this professionalization and official recognition of journalism is a far cry from the early days of the Soviet era, the heyday of "worker correspondents", when real journalists were blithely lumped together with copy-editors, proofreaders and various technical workers on newspapers. Besides permitting closer Party supervision of a carefully selected corps of journalists, chosen for their fidelity to the regime's goals and their day-to-day influence on Soviet press and propaganda media, the new moves can be seen as part of the progressive bureaucratization and rationalization which has gradually mastered all aspects of life in the USSR.

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**No. 10, 1959/60**

## **THE CREATION OF AN ASSOCIATION OF SOVIET JOURNALISTS**

by

**A. Gaev**

The first All-Union Congress of Soviet journalists, which took place on November 12-14, 1959, and the new organization--the Association of Soviet Journalists--founded during its deliberations are important indications of a new attitude toward journalists on the part of the Communist Party and the Soviet government.

To begin with, the Congress was held in a grand style. A total of 751 delegates from all the republics of the USSR met in the Hall of Columns of the House of Trade Unions. Present were many guests from Communist bloc countries, including China, Korea, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary and East Germany. In accordance with long established practice, the solemnity of the occasion was underlined by the appearance of the entire Soviet ruling clique, headed by Khrushchev. The Congress was opened with a message of greeting from the Party Central Committee, read by Central Committee Presidium member Suslov.

### **Changing Attitude Toward Journalists**

These marks of distinction may be interpreted as signs of a changing attitude on the part of Soviet officialdom to "journalists" in the broadest sense, i. e., those concerned with the day-to-day business of addressing the public with news and propaganda through various media--press, radio and television. The official attitude has passed through several stages since the beginning of the Soviet era. At first, during the Civil War, most of the material published in the daily and periodical press was written by highly-placed Party workers, while purely professional journalists were almost completely ignored and their role was largely confined to purely technical functions such as copy-editing, proofreading, etc. Later, in 1922, the "worker correspondent," a part-time reporter employed in a factory, mine, etc., became the central figure in Soviet journalism. A little later still, there appeared "rural correspondents," who reported on life in the country, particularly on agriculture.

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At that time, these "journalists" enjoyed an appreciably higher status than the most highly skilled professional journalist. It is significant that in the 1920's there were two All-Union Congresses of "worker and rural correspondents", but none of journalists as that word is generally understood. Not infrequently, journalists and other writers were obliged to assume the title of "worker correspondent" in order to get their work printed. From 1922 — 25, for example, the poet Nikolai Ushakov was one of the "worker correspondents" of the Kiev paper Proletarskaya Pravda, which at that time was headed by the well-known critic S. Pakentreiger. The writer S. Semenov, author of the novel Nataliya Tarpova, which won some attention before it was banned, published his work as a "worker correspondent". The same applies to Soviet drama prizewinner, I Kocherga, who at the time was employed as a proofreader on the Zhitomir provincial newspaper Radyanska Volyn. (Soviet Volhynia).

#### Slow Recognition for Journalists

The situation changed for a third time in 1926-27, when the title of "worker correspondent" lost some of its vogue and became something of an anachronism. The Soviet Entsiklopedichesky Slovar (Encyclopedic Dictionary) Vol. III, Moscow, 1955, p. 56) sums up the entire phenomenon of "worker and rural correspondents" as "a manifestation of Soviet socialist democracy." Also, after 1926-27, the status of professional journalists showed a corresponding rise, and they began to occupy a leading position even irrespective of Party membership. In the 1930's, for example, one of the country's leading essayists in the world of journalism was the non-Party writer for Pravda, Aleksei Kolosov. David Zaslavsky, at that time a non-Party man, was head of the foreign section of Pravda; the non-Party essayist, Konstantin Paustovsky, wrote for Pravda and Izvestia.

It is important, however, to note that throughout the pre-war period even the most prominent Soviet journalists, including such people as A Zorich, Mikhail Koltsov, V. Katayev, Yevgeny Peorov, Ilya Ilf, L. Lench and Rylkin, were hardly given the official recognition that they deserved, even though they held prominent public positions and were highly paid. This kind of recognition seems at last to have arrived with the recent Congress of Journalists, although its aim would appear to be a utilitarian one--that of exploiting the services of journalists as far as possible for the implementation of Party plans. In other words, quite apart from such questions as social background, Party membership or individual views, the value of journalists has come to be recognized insofar as they are useful to the Party. The editor of Pravda, Sayukov, in his speech to the Congress, assured the Party that:

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Soviet journalists will devote all their energies and knowledge to the great cause of propagating the ideas of Marxism-Leninism, to the implementation of the historic decisions of the Twenty-First Party Congress, to the cause of constructive Communism (Radio Moscow, November 12, 1959).

The Congress went off in the same manner and spirit as many another in the USSR: the delegates expressed their gratitude for the acknowledgements made of their work and promised to speed it up, while the representatives of Party and government showered compliments mingled with exhortations to intensify work in the required direction. Official acknowledgements were not, however, confined to complimentary phrases. As mentioned at the beginning of this analysis, the Congress decided to establish an Association of Journalists of the USSR and it elected a governing board for the new organization.

#### Association's Membership to Be Restricted

The significance of the creation of an Association of Journalists is best seen against its historical background. Hitherto, journalists in the USSR have always belonged to the same trade union as all other types of press workers, ranging from editor-in-chief to filing clerk or messenger boy. Only in special cases, when a journalist had published a book or was a regular contributor to some important literary magazine, could he join the Association of Writers. Examples of this are V. Ovechkin, V. Oloukhin, Boris Polevoi, I. Ryabov and the present editor of Izvestia, Adzhubei, who began his career on the staff of Komsomolskaya Pravda. But now journalists have been put on another footing and separated from the editorial and technical staff. However, it may be supposed that, as it is with the Association of Writers of the USSR, entry into the Association of Journalists will be restricted. This is plainly indicated by some figures given by Satyukov which imply that not even all professional contributors to newspapers will be considered journalists. According to Satyukov, there are a total of 10,500 newspapers in the USSR, on which 23,000 professional journalists are employed. This would mean that the average number of "journalists" employed by any one Soviet newspaper is just over two. Since the number of journalists employed by each of the papers published in Moscow and the various capitals of republics, as well as by many oblast (district) and krai (territorial) papers and by the larger specialized papers is certainly greater than two and is frequently upwards of 10, it is plain that it is not every editor who can count on being admitted into the new association. In fact, the purpose of the new organization is to sift out the most loyal and useful members of the journalistic profession, those who supply the propaganda for the large-circulation newspapers of

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the USSR. According to its constitution, the new organization does not differ from other societies uniting Soviet artists or "creative workers".: ;

The Association of Journalists of the USSR is a voluntary, creative, social (i. e. , non-governmental) organization of professional journalists employed in the periodical press, in information organs, publishing houses, radio and television (Radio Moscow, November 12, 1959).

However, as regards both its organization and membership, the new body pursues an aim which has been clearly formulated by Satyukov:

Our association must constantly call upon journalists to work with the avant-garde of the Seven-Year Plan, to join the decisive sectors of Communist construction, must teach them to look closely at life. . . to propagate the sprouts of Communism in a clear and readily accessible form, to fight passionately everything that hinders our movement forward. (Ibid., November 12, 1959)

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